

WOMEN VETERANS HISTORICAL PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Edna Smith Wilson

INTERVIEWER: Hermann J. Trojanowski

DATE: July 19, 2006

[Begin Interview]

HT: July 19, 2006 and the time is 2:25, Wednesday afternoon. And my name is Hermann Trojanowski. And I'm at the home of Edna Wilson in Durham, North Carolina, to conduct an oral history interview for the Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

Thank you so much for talking with me this afternoon. I really appreciate your time and sitting down with me. If you will give me your full name, we'll see how you sound on the tape recorder.

EW: Well, my full name is Edna Smith Wilson.

[Tape recorder turned off]

HT: Well, Ms. Wilson, thanks again for talking with me today. If you could tell me some biographical information about yourself such as where you were born and when.

EW: Right. I was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, March 8, 1922.

HT: And can you tell me something about the time you were growing up in New Jersey, about your parents and your siblings?

EW: Well, I don't know where to begin. I am one of five children, the oldest of five children.
I thought maybe you were going to ask me more about my father and my Marine Corps, how come I got into the Marine Corps.

HT: That will come later.

EW: This is later. You want to know this? Well, I was only thirteen when we left. We moved to Hendersonville, North Carolina, because my father was a golfer, and he retired. He retired as a very young man.

HT: And what line of work was he in when he—

EW: He had a business in Plainfield, New Jersey. And I don't know how much to tell you.

HT: Well, as little or as much as you want.

EW: Well, that's enough about Plainfield. I went to a girls' school in Hendersonville, North Carolina. And I guess I was a freshman there. And then my family moved to what my father thought was God's country, to Arkansas, where he had been born. And we left North Carolina and moved to a town called Conway, Arkansas, near Little Rock, partly because there were three colleges there. And we were all about, you know, one right after the other ready for college [laughs]. So, I know that had something to do with it. And, then, we moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas. And that's where I attended and finished the University of Arkansas.

HT: And where did you attend high school, was that in Hendersonville?

EW: No, this was the girls' school.

HT: The girls' school. And do you recall what your favorite subject was in high school?

EW: Languages.

HT: And what was your major in college?

EW: French.

HT: And what were your plans to be a teacher perhaps or—

EW: No. I just liked it. I just liked languages.

HT: And, so, after you graduated from college, what were your next plans?

EW: Well, before I graduated in 1943, I had always hoped to go to Pasadena, to the Playhouse. I wanted to be an actress.

HT: Ah.

EW: I had started very young, doing that—but my father absolutely refused, and I didn't have the guts, shall I put it, to go out on my own. So, anyway, the war had already begun and I felt, okay, I'll do something for the war effort. So, I applied for—to the Red Cross. And

when I got the answer back it was in St. Louis, [Missouri]. “And that’s too close,” said I. So I said to my father, “I really do want to go into the Marine Corps.” My father had been a Marine.

HT: Ah.

EW: He was wounded—one of the first Marines wounded at Chateau-Thierry. And he had been a baseball player and was wounded and lost his foot. He could never play baseball again. But he was very loyal—a loyal Marine.

HT: This was during the First World War, I assume?

EW: Yes.

HT: And, so, he influenced you to join or did—

EW: Absolutely not.

HT: Oh, he did not.

EW: No, women in the Marine Corps, no, absolutely not. So, my next attempt to do something was to become Rosie the Riveter. So, I applied for a place in Kansas City, [Kansas], and when I got—I knew that I would not do that. But when I got the notice to go my father said, “All right, join the Marines.” So, that’s how I got into the Marine Corps.

HT: And what did your mother think about all this?

EW: Well, mother had been in Motor Corps in World War II. And what is interesting about that is that in the Women’s Memorial, when I went up for the first time I talked with General—ooh, I’ve forgotten her name. How could I? But, anyway, I said my mother was in the Motor Corps you have nothing here about the Motor Corps. Now, you know, they were not military but they were doing—mother’s father, gave an ambulance. If you give an ambulance to the Motor Corps, you could choose the driver. And mother was about twenty years old at Columbia University, and she became the driver. My father was wounded in the—and came across the ocean and landed in New York. And mother was taking the wounded soldiers to the hospital. And that’s how she met my father. I guess it was love at first sight. It must have been [laughs].

HT: Now, who actually ran the Motor Corps because I’ve never heard of this either to tell you the truth.

EW: Well, it was a government thing. I’m sure it was.

HT: Federal, federal government?

EW: I think so. But anyway the Motor Corps, you know they had uniforms. So, mother had no feeling. She thought it would be fine. So, I was recruited, I thought, to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School] because I was a senior in college. But you have to go, as most people know, to boot camp first for six weeks. And, then, you have to go to wherever you are assigned for six months. And then they were supposed to say, “Yes, you’re going to OCS.” Turned out that the battalion just before mine at Camp Lejeune, [North Carolina], where I was there in July and August, no air conditioning. But, anyway, the battalion before mine was the last one on the East Coast to be accepted for OCS. So, I could imagine myself doing KP [kitchen patrol duty] somewhere. Instead I was sent to San Francisco, [California]. It couldn’t have been better.

HT: And when was this, when did you join?

EW: Well, I joined in April 1943. But I finished boot camp in July or early August.

HT: And where did you go to boot camp?

EW: Camp Lejeune.

HT: Oh, Camp Lejeune. By that time it already—because at one time it was—wasn’t that at Hunter [College] at one time, something like that?

EW: No, I don’t think so. Hunter was for the navy women.

HT: Can you describe what boot camp was like?

EW: Well—

HT: What are your thoughts about that?

EW: Well, it was a lot of fun, hot as it was. The best part was the marching. We all loved the marching.

HT: Can you describe what a typical day was like?

EW: It was tough. We got up early. You marched, and you went to classes and I’m sure, you know, I had all of this written down. I was hoping that I could just give it to you because [laughs] but it didn’t come back from—But I don’t know what more to say about the day. It was, you know, we just had a lot of classes.

HT: Had you ever been away from home prior to this on your own?

EW: No, no.

HT: So, this was quite a new experience, then?

EW: Yes, but I didn't have any problem with that.

HT: Well, when you enlisted, I assume you had to take some sort of physical and written test as well, is that correct?

EW: Might have had to have a physical but we didn't—I don't recall taking any other kind of test. What was interesting when I went into the Marine Corps, my younger brother wanted to join, too. So, we have a picture of the two of us, and it appeared in a lot of newspapers. Two of these people are joining together.

HT: So, you were sworn in at the same time?

EW: Yes.

HT: Great. That's wonderful. Well, we alluded to this a little bit earlier about how your family felt about you joining, what about your friends and neighbors?

EW: Well, everybody was doing something. I mean all the women. And so many of my friends went into the WACs [Women's Army Corps] when it first began. And a good friend went into the navy. So, this was very common.

HT: And what did you think of the Marine Corps uniform?

EW: Well, we had the best looking. We had the best looking uniform. The only problem were the cotton stockings until they finally issued us silk stockings [laughs].

HT: I imagine silk stockings in those days were rather rare.

EW: Well, yes, they finally did, the Marine Corps. I don't think we wore cotton stockings after boot camp. Well, living in San Francisco, you know, we were just out on our own. You might as well have been a civilian. And we lived on the economy.

HT: And so San Francisco was your first duty base?

EW: And my only.

HT: And what type of work did you do in San Francisco?

EW: I was supply a clerk, I guess, amusingly because I was no good in math and we had to keep these records [laughs]. But, anyway, that's where I was at the depot of supply on Harrison Street.

HT: So, I imagine this was a rather large warehouse?

EW: Well, large buildings.

HT: Large buildings?

EW: You know, just like offices.

HT: Offices?

EW: Good location, right down on the Embarcadero.

HT: And you said you lived on the economy, so you didn't live in a barracks—

EW: No.

HT: —once you got to San Francisco?

EW: No.

HT: And did you share rooms or houses?

EW: I did. I was very fortunate. My roommate and I had a place with Edith Bristol, who was a well-known journalist who had just retired from the *San Francisco Chronicle* or the *San Francisco Examiner*. So, she had tickets to everything, knew everybody. And we had a plush berth.

HT: And what did you ladies do for fun after duty, after duty hours?

EW: All kind. I don't think you could record all what we did. Turn that off and then I want to tell you something.

HT: Okay.

[Tape recorder turned off]

HT: Well, tell me about that experience in San Francisco that you had.

EW: Well, that's my favorite war story. I was standing on a street corner. It was not quite dark. And I was waiting for my roommate to come to join me for dinner. And all of a sudden this woman came up to me and she said, "Out of here, Honey, this is my corner."

HT: [laughs] She must not have recognized your uniform?

EW: No idea. You can back up. I had one funny story about boot camp.

HT: That's fine, sure.

EW: Because I've told this. I wrote my parents all the time. And this is why I have all these records to show, you know, how it really was. But I said the hardest thing at all was that we had to go out at least one night in that six time and patrol the place. We had a stick. What were these sticks called?

HT: Batons?

EW: I forgot.

HT: Something like that?

EW: Whatever.

HT: Night sticks?

EW: And a flashlight. And the night stick was to kill the mosquitoes, fierce mosquitoes. So, that was our very tough duty that night [laughs]. Okay.

HT: Oh, gosh. Do you recall what the name of the unit was in San Francisco by any chance?

EW: [Snaps fingers] I don't know.

HT: That's fine. And the type of work you did were there both men and women doing the same sort of work?

EW: Very few. There were a few officers. There was a woman officer, and there was a master sergeant. Ah, maybe there were two master sergeants. They did—I don't know what they were doing. They were supervising or something.

HT: I'm assuming the entire work force was women?

EW: And mostly civilians.

HT: Oh, mostly civilian, oh, Okay.

EW: Very few military.

HT: Okay.

EW: In my office anyway.

HT: Were there any males in your office at all or just women?

EW: Well the one master sergeant.

HT: The one master sergeant. The reason I was asking—

EW: We worked for the bank, you know, of record thing.

HT: The reason I was asking if there were any men in your office I was just wondered if you were treated equally as a woman—

EW: Well, I think—

HT: —like the men and that sort of thing.

EW: —it was just like working in an office, I suppose. The only thing is that they made—The women had to get the coffee ready in the morning and stop and get the doughnuts on the way to work.

HT: So, this sounds almost like an eight to five job?

EW: Yes, that's—

HT: That's what it basically was.

EW: And we worked seven days a week.

HT: Oh, you did?

EW: Well, at first. And then it was six days. We had Sunday off.

HT: We talked a little bit about officers. What did you think of the Marine female officers?

EW: Had very little contact with them, almost none. One of the wonderful things about San Francisco and the people who live there and the environment was that they entertained the enlisted people in a way that they didn't with the officers strangely enough. But we got invited to more things and the officers were to take care of themselves.

HT: Well, of course, they had officers' clubs to go to and that sort of thing.

EW: That's right they felt—but we had clubs, too.

HT: But you probably didn't have as much discretionary funds as the officers did. But that was very nice. Now did that happen all over the country at that time?

EW: I don't know.

HT: Okay.

EW: I don't know. I just think the San Franciscans were so—

HT: What was the hardest thing you ever had to do physically while you were in the Marine Corps?

EW: In boot camp I used to be on the rifle team. My shoulder began to hurt so I decided I was not very good at shooting. That was the hardest thing.

HT: You had target practice and that sort of thing?

EW: For a little while. I didn't stay with it very long. But I mean if you were asking what was the hardest thing, the rest of it. There were a number of women who couldn't take the physical part of it. So they had to leave boot camp. And I think the heat had an awful lot to do with it.

HT: What about emotionally, did you ever have any hard times emotionally while you were in the Marine—

EW: No.

HT: —Corps?

EW: No. I want to tell you how we got from Camp Lejeune to San Francisco.

HT: Okay, great.

EW: Because most people would not realize this. We were—we went by train, southern route, and most of the time there was no way to feed us. We also were attached to a troop train. And the troops, naturally, were fed first. So, we never knew when we would have breakfast, lunch, or dinner. But the thing they often—most often did, was they must have known ahead, called ahead to the towns, the little cafes and then they would march us off the train into the town and into the cafes. And if you don't think that was the most fun for us as well as for the people in town. A lot of people don't know that that's how we managed to eat between Camp Lejeune and San Francisco.

HT: Oh, my gosh.

EW: Between San Francisco.

HT: So, there must have been maybe a couple of thousand of people on those trains?

EW: I don't know how many troops. I don't know how many men. And I was in charge of a small group, so I had a little bedroom. But I don't remember how many people.

HT: So—

EW: And then we would drop the women off at least, you know, close to where they would be. Then there would be buses, I guess, taking them to the bases.

HT: And how long did it take you to go across country? It must have taken quite a few days.

EW: Oh, yes. We were sidetracked in El Paso, [Texas], in the heat because we had to let the troops go by, troop trains go by. I don't know, maybe four days, five days. Not too long.

HT: And was it a fairly comfortable trip? You weren't standing the entire time or anything crazy like that, I assume?

EW: No, it was just the heat.

HT: And, of course, no air conditioning.

EW: No air conditioning, no.

HT: And you had to wear your uniform buttoned up that entire time or could you get more comfortable?

EW: We had our summer uniforms. When we were getting close to San Francisco we would change into our winter uniform. We never got into our summer uniforms in San Francisco unless we were going out of the city.

HT: Would you recall any embarrassing moments during your military career?

EW: No, I don't think there were any.

HT: How about humorous moments?

EW: Lots.

HT: Other than the one—in addition to the street scene [laughs].

EW: I think the amusing thing is that they had college person and knowing so many of the fellows that went through. A lot of them was ninety-day wonders in the navy and they were in the Pacific and then they would come back. If I would be out with an officer and they would be saluted, I would salute, too, just inadvertently. Here I'm saluting the enlisted man, whoever is saluting the officer. I think that must have been awfully funny.

HT: Oh, gosh. And did you have any problems being—you say “out,” you were not dating officers, I’m assuming?

EW: Sure.

HT: Oh, you were? Okay?

EW: We—you see the difference with Marian Krugman is she was on the base.

HT: That’s right.

EW: And she had to pretend sometimes—she probably told you.

HT: She told us of the stories, some of her adventures about dating officers.

EW: No, I—you can turn this off and I will tell you something else funny.

HT: Okay.

[Tape recorder turned off]

HT: Well, did you have any other humorous stories that you can recall that might be recordable?

EW: Well, not that come to mind right now.

HT: Maybe a little later on and that sort of thing.

EW: I had an interesting thing happened. It was a strange coincidence. Because I had a brother a little younger, not the one that enlisted when I did. But my younger, the one just younger than I, was a lieutenant in the Marine Corps. And he was at [Battle of] Iwo Jima. He was with the 3rd Division that went in second or third day. And I was standing, again, on the street in San Francisco when two enlisted guys, Marines, came up—I recognized the insignia because I can’t—I knew it was the 3rd Division or whatever it was. And I said—when they asked me how to get to someplace, I stopped and talked for a few minutes just on the street, these young guys. And they said they had just—they had been to—on Iwo Jima and they were on leave. I looked and said, “Well, my brother was, but you know there were so many, I’m sure you wouldn’t know who this was. And I said his name was William Smith, Lieutenant Smith. “Lt. Smith, well, he was our platoon leader.” Isn’t that a coincidence?

HT: That is.

EW: And they knew because they told me some things about him. And Bill says, my brother Bill is still alive. He just gets tears in his eyes when he thinks about that strange coincidence and what nice things these fellows had to say about him.

HT: That's wonderful.

EW: That's neat.

HT: That is. Well, I may have asked you this already, but how—you probably had a lot of spare time in San Francisco in the evenings and that sort of things. What type of—did you go dancing, movies, what did—

EW: We did a lot of ice skating. I remember that. And I met a lot of the townspeople through women and their families that were just wonderful. Oh, and, of course, there were the concerts and there was theater and knowing Edith Bristol and what she did for us, you know, we really had a—we had a good time during the war. That didn't seem quite right with all the stuff that was going on other places.

HT: Would you recall what your favorite songs and movies or dances were from that period of time?

EW: How about, "I'll Be Seeing You," do you remember that one?

HT: Yes.

EW: "In all the old familiar places." "I'll Be Seeing You," that was a favorite. Oh, there were plenty of them.

HT: And did you ever meet any famous people at the local clubs or anything like that?

EW: Didn't actually meet him but encountered Gene Kelly at one of those hamburger places near where we were living. And it was very late at night. And he was sitting on a stool drinking coffee. And we couldn't believe that was Gene Kelly. We saw a lot of people like Helen Hayes in the restaurant. And then I had one other good story. You remember the play, *Harvey*?

HT: Yes.

EW: Well, Joe E. Brown was playing in San Francisco. And I was at a restaurant with some other people. I think it was enough for four people. There were two men and I at a table. There were three of us. And I said, "Well, we'll save this other seat for Harvey." And just then a voice nearby said, "I'm sorry, but Harvey is having dinner with me." And there's Joe E. Brown pretending that his rabbit is having dinner with him. So, at the time of dessert and coffee, Joe E. Brown came over to the table and he said, "Harvey can sit here with you now and have dessert." That's just a cute story [laughs].

HT: Would you recall what the general mood of the country was during that period of time? What was it like?

EW: You know it is interesting when we think back about—I think we were so concerned about ourselves and what we were doing. I don't remember being terribly concerned about anything else. It doesn't sound very, you know, because I'm a very concerned person now. But I don't honestly remember that it was—what the mood was.

EW: And the rationing was not all that severe, you know. We couldn't have various things. Gasoline, I guess.

HT: But living in the big city gas probably wasn't a major concern since you would use public transportation?

EW: Not for us personally. But one of the persons that was living with—had a room with Edith Bristol—had been in the Coast Guard. I guess he—I don't know how old he was. He probably seemed old to me at thirty. But he had a car. And he would take us a number of places. And then I had this younger brother that I first mentioned came back from—no, it was before he went overseas. And he was stationed in San Diego, [California]. And this friend knew people there in San Diego. And I think—no, I'll know who it was. Wait a minute. I have to back up. This is hard, because I hope this isn't recorded.

HT: It is.

EW: Oh, gracious. No, it wasn't—my brother was in San Diego but he met me in Santa Barbara, [California]. And the reason I'm mentioning this is because this very good friend in San Francisco had gotten in touch with friends in Santa Barbara, and they entertained us. But they drove us all around. So, they saved gasoline coupons or however they did it.

HT: Now, living in San Francisco was, of course, a lot of navy and ships and that sort of thing. Were you ever afraid of the Japanese perhaps coming in a submarine and doing damage—

EW: Never.

HT: —or anything like that?

EW: Never. Never. That wasn't. There were a lot of ships and what I thought—this shouldn't be recorded. But it's an all right story. It's really true. But I really would like to do was take the ferries back and forth. So, nothing like having a date with one of your friends who just come back from the Pacific and say, "Let's spend—Let's go someplace on the ferry. They'd just gotten off a ship [laughs]."

HT: That's right. [laughs]

EW: But that was something we did quite often.

HT: Would you go to Oakland, [California].

EW: Yeah, whatever—

HT: Or Berkeley, [California].

EW: Wherever we wanted to go. And, then, the Pepsi-Cola Building, of course, was very, very wonderful for the enlisted people on Market Street. And they had even accommodations to spend the night so that you didn't have to go wherever you were living at the time, going too far away. And there was also a club for the enlisted women. And I was one of the hostesses. So, I had a key where you could go up there.

HT: This was in the Pepsi-Cola Building?

EW: No, in—but there was the Pepsi-Cola Building that had—You could go there after work and, you know freshen up. And I mean it was just a very wonderful place.

HT: Was this sponsored by the Pepsi-Cola people?

EW: Yes.

HT: Never heard of that. That was very nice.

EW: Yes.

HT: Sort of a USO [United Service Organizations] club type situation, I guess?

EW: Without entertainment. I don't recall the entertainment. It was just a very large building, very well equipped. And you could spend the night which was nice. So that if you had a date and you were in the city and later on we moved from where Edith Bristol was. But it was nice, and you could spend the night.

HT: And you said you did a little bit of traveling around. Did you ever go up to Napa Valley and the wine country?

EW: Oh, yes. On the river. What was it? Russian River. A Marine Corps friend, a young woman, who had a family who had a place up there. And we—my roommate and I traveled quite a bit. We went on up when the big ships came in to Seattle, [Washington], we went up to Seattle. Went on to—went on to Vancouver, [British Columbia, Canada],

went on to Banff, [British Columbia, Canada], Lake Louise in the snow, and probably a lot of other places.

HT: Sounds like a wonderful, wonderful place to visit that part of the country.

EW: Oh, absolutely.

HT: That's great. Do you recall where you were when VE Day [Victory in Europe] was announced in May of 1945?

EW: No, not really. We were so, you know, involved with the Pacific as far as that. But the man I finally married was the one that was in Europe so I have learned about that. But as far as any, you know, great feeling.

HT: How about VJ Day [Victory in Japan]?

EW: Oh, VJ Day.

HT: VJ was what?

EW: I was not working that day. That's the first time and the last time I ever went out on the street and thumbed a ride. I had to get down to Market Street and see what was going on. And I was to meet a friend, a woman, and we were going to have dinner together that night. And, so, there was no way to reach her. We didn't have cell phones at that time to call one another. So, I was to meet her at the St. Francis. We got so caught up with what was going on on Market Street that I had a terrible time finding her finally. Then, instead of trying to get home, we went back and stayed with a friend who had a place on Nob Hill. But I wrote a letter home about this the very next day. And what I observed wasn't always just what the newspaper reported. But it was all very exciting and all very true. So, a few years ago when they were celebrating the fiftieth, I got out this old letter and typed it up and it was printed in one of the San Francisco papers. I don't know whether it was the *Examiner* or the *Chronicle*. And I got telephone calls and I got letters from people who had been down there on that day. So, sometimes writing things the exact time it happens is better than trying to remember it many years later.

HT: What happened to that letter?

EW: I still have it.

HT: You still have it?

EW: And that's with those archives things. You know, that's one of the things I wrote about. This you can just have it. This to me was the most moving thing that happened to me in San Francisco.

HT: Okay. [reads letter]
Can you describe a little bit more detail about what that day was like for you?

EW: That?

HT: VJ Day.

EW: VJ Day. Well, you know, I was just caught up with that kind of excitement and then worried about how I was going to meet this woman and have dinner and get home. I knew I couldn't really get back that day. Taxis weren't running. Street cars weren't running. And, so, we managed to get up to Nob Hill where some military friends had a—

[Tape recorder turned off]

HT: Well, tell me about your theater experience in—

EW: Well—

HT: —San Francisco.

EW: We all tried to have something of interest to do. And it was through the Marine Corps. And I remember. I think it was a Ruth Gordon play. And I had the lead in it. And we didn't have any back up people. And the leading man—and we were going to be at the Gary Theatre in San Francisco [laughs]. And his unit was called up to go over, you know, go overseas. And that was the end of that. That was going to be the biggest part of the performance. The other things we performed in hospitals and places around. But that's what I did. And, then, I was in the choral group.

HT: And the theatre, I guess, you did all that in San Francisco. But the choral group, did you go out of San Francisco?

EW: Yes, to where—to the hospitals.

HT: Wonderful.

EW: So, that was what I was doing. I don't know about this. I just thought you might like to read it.

HT: Well, if you want to sort of paraphrase it a little bit, you may.

EW: Well, I mean I think it's—

HT: Or you can read it in its entirety, that will be fine.

EW: I don't know how anybody would feel about those last lines. But that's the whole point of writing the thing.

HT: Well, it's part of history, so.

EW: Yes, it is part. It really happened.

HT: So, we don't want to—

EW: Well, I would just say that this is— Is this on?

HT: Yes, it is on.

EW: [reads] "It was just several days before Christmas in 1944. A troop ship had come into San Francisco bringing Marines from the Pacific. And the Women Reserve Marine Corps, choral group had been asked to meet the ship. We often did this, but this time it was to welcome the men home and sing a few Christmas carols. I was a member of the coral group which was often asked to sing at hospitals and this was the first shipboard performance. The men looked so young and so weary it was really a moving experience. We could see tears in the eyes of some of them who were close and—close to the stage. And even we women ring when we sang, "I'll Be Home for Christmas." It was very moving. After several songs we sang the Marine Corps hymn, only to be booed at the end of it. Booed. Why? Why? Well, we were allowed to remain aboard for a short while and then go with the men. And it was then that we heard them say, 'We've been through hell, and we don't want to hear anything more about the Marine Corps.'" It makes me cry to think about it.

HT: That's very, very interesting, yes.

EW: This appeared in something, I don't know, that I wrote. I do some writings of things.

HT: Well, whom did you admire and respect as sort of your heroes or heroines from that period of time?

EW: Long pause. I really admired Franklin Roosevelt. And the reason I remember—I'm mentioning this is at his death—and we got the news during work hour, and one of the—one of the master sergeants, this very good looking guy who just, I don't know, I just think he was a terrible person. His looks were the only thing that saved him, I guess. But he laughed when he got the news. He thought that was the best news he had heard: Franklin Roosevelt was dead. Terrible.

HT: That is terrible. And did you—what did you think of Mrs. Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt?

[Tape recorder turned off]

HT: Well, tell me the story you just mentioned a minute ago about living in the same place as Mrs. Roosevelt's—

EW: Friend.

HT: —friend.

EW: Well, Eleanor Roosevelt had a friend, I'm sure she was a dancer, Maris Chaney was her name. And Maris Chaney had this apartment. They were very, very simple on Taylor Street just off Nob Hill.

[Background talking. Tape recorder turned off].

HT: You were talking about Maris Chaney on Taylor Street when we turned the recorder off.

EW: Yes, and Eleanor Roosevelt visited her there. And there was a picture of them in the newspaper. I have the picture of them. And some months later Maris Chaney moved out, friends of mine moved in. They, too, had to move out. And we finally got—my roommate and I got that apartment. That's the closest I came to Eleanor Roosevelt.

HT: [laughs]

EW: [laughs]

HT: Oh, mercy. Would you consider yourself to be an independent person?

EW: I think so, yeah.

HT: And have you always been that way or do you think being in the Marine Corps helped you along the way a little bit?

EW: It was the first time away from home. I would say the Marine Corps really made it—really made me independent [laughs].

HT: Would you consider yourself to be a pioneer, or a trailblazer or a trendsetter because you joined the military when women weren't doing that sort of thing?

EW: Well, in the environment that I was in women were. And I don't really feel I was a trailblazer. So many of them had gone on ahead. Most of them had been able to get, you

know, officer's training because they were, you know, they were lady seniors when I was a freshman.

HT: Well, what kind of impact you think having been in the Marine Corps had on your life immediately you got out and in the long term over the last fifty-some years?

EW: Well, I have some time wondered—but I'm glad I didn't do it—I was offered a commission after the war ended. And, you know, they were sending women to Hawaii at that time. But I had such a good berth I didn't want to leave. Later on I married an air force friend and he was air force intelligence and we spent one of the tours of duty in Hawaii. I don't know. I was very confused. I was as bad as the men coming back from the war knowing just what you wanted to do. Oh, turn it off, and I'll tell you another one.

HT: Oh, okay.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

HT: Now, you got out in—

EW: April of—

HT: April 1946.

EW: Yeah. No, does it say '46?

HT: It says '46 on here. Is that—

EW: Well, I guess that's right.

HT: And did you meet your husband while you were in the military?

EW: No, I met him in college.

HT: So, did you use the GI Bill after you got out of the military?

EW: I didn't, no.

HT: Oh, you did not.

EW: No.

HT: But you went back to school after you got out, is that correct? Or you did not go back to school?

EW: No, I did not go back, I decided to get married.

HT: So, how did you meet your husband?

EW: Well, he was the one I had known in college.

HT: Oh, prior to joining the military?

EW: Oh, yes.

HT: Oh, I see. Okay.

EW: He had only been asking for seven years. So, I had decided anybody that faithful [laughs]

HT: And when did you get married?

EW: In 1947.

HT: Nineteen forty-seven.

EW: Nineteen forty-seven, a year later.

HT: And what line of work was he in?

EW: Well, he was air force intelligence major.

HT: Oh, so he was career air force?

EW: Not really. He was a reservist. But he stayed in. And then he had his—after a second heart attack he had to get out. And he taught school in Washington, D.C.

HT: And where were some of the places that you lived? Did you do a lot of traveling around?

EW: Oh, my. You mean in my married life?

HT: Yes.

EW: No, we were in Washington, D.C. Then we went to Germany. At the time of Korea he was sent to Germany, not Korea. And then we were sent to California. And then we were sent back to New York City, Mitchell Field, and then we were sent to Connecticut to the University of Connecticut at Storrs for the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] unit. And from there we went back across the continent and went to Hawaii. And came back from Hawaii and he'd already had his first heart attack. And came back to Washington, D.C., and that's where we were at the time he died.

HT: Did you work outside the home—

EW: No.

HT: —during that time?

EW: Just volunteer things, unpaid.

HT: And what about acting in the theater?

EW: I never did it again.

HT: Not even on a volunteer basis?

EW: No, never did. Had an interesting life, though.

HT: If you had to do it over again, would you join the Marine Corps again?

EW: It's awfully hard to say what you would do under circumstances. I'm certainly glad that I did, you know, absolutely. It was a great experience. Not everybody had such a great experience. Not everybody had such a good duty station. So, I was just fortunate. And at first it was disappointing not to go to OCS, but I think, as I said, in San Francisco it didn't really matter. It was fine. That's the story.

HT: And what—did you ever have children?

EW: Yes, I have two sons.

HT: And did they join the military along the way somewhere?

EW: No, but the younger son is a great swimmer. Both are good swimmers. But the younger one was at East—was, no, was before. He was given a Presidential appointment to Annapolis, [Maryland], not because of his grades but because of his swimming. And I told him after when he decided—this was during the Vietnam War, and he decided—I would have missed the marching. I'd love to see the marching.

HT: So, did he go to Annapolis?

EW: I said no, he did not take it.

HT: Oh, didn't.

EW: My younger son—My older son would have gone to Canada with my husband's approval. We were very opposed to what was happening. My husband was one of the

first consultants to leave to go to Vietnam, one of the first consultants. On the first trip he came back he said, "This is nothing we should be involved in. It's not going to be a domino theory." And it wasn't. "And this is not a war we can really win." And I keep thinking of that about today and some of the things that are going on.

HT: Well, how do you feel about women in combat positions?

EW: That's interesting. You know, I have a hard time—I'm getting—You know, I'm too old to believe that women can be doing all the things they're doing partly because—it sounds foolish to say—it doesn't seem very ladylike. Even pumping gasoline gives me—I won't pump gasoline. There are just things like that. And to think that women are—except the women who were flying. And I think that was somewhat different. But not in combat. We did have a lot of women who were flying.

HT: Well, I don't have any more formal questions.

EW: Well, good.

HT: Is there anything that you would like to add—

EW: No.

HT: —to your interview that's—

EW: You've got more than you need [laughs].

HT: Can never have enough.

EW: Oh, dear.

HT: Well, thank you so much.

EW: Well, thank you. Because it's always interesting, you know, to go back and think. And I knew you were coming but I just didn't—I was hoping I would get my—

HT: I'm going to turn this off—

[End of Interview]